FWIS 120: Fiction and Empathy
Fall 2016
MWF 1:00-1:50pm
Keck Hall 105

Instructor: Burke Nixon
Email: bnixon@rice.edu
Phone: (713) 348-4494
Office: Fondren 424
Office hours: By appointment at Brochstein Pavilion

Course Description

Is there a link between reading literary fiction and empathizing with others? Recent research seems to answer this question in the affirmative, but writers and readers have been making (and challenging) similar claims for almost as long as fiction has existed. In this course, we'll explore and debate the question ourselves by examining various works of fiction, as well as literary criticism on fiction and empathy. Along the way, we'll confront a number of questions: What does empathy actually mean? What's the difference between empathy and compassion? Can a work of fiction actually change the way we perceive others in real life? We'll analyze the work of 19th and 20th century fiction writers who are often praised for their ability to inhabit the consciousness of their characters, as well as contemporary authors who attempt to do the same thing in different ways. We'll also examine and debate what literary critics have claimed on this topic, focusing in particular on the elements of fiction and how those elements might provoke empathy. Over the course of semester, students will be able to come to develop their own conclusions about the link between fiction and empathy, while developing their skills as a readers, writers, presenters, and critical thinkers.

Content Learning Goals

By taking this course, students will be able to:

- Develop their own definition of empathy and explain the relationship between empathy and other related terms (i.e. compassion, understanding, sympathy, etc.)
- Respond logically and convincingly to cultural and scholarly debates about the link between reading literary fiction and moral or emotional intelligence
- Familiarize themselves with humanities research related to empathy and fiction
- Recognize and distinguish various forms of narration in fiction
- Distinguish and explain the techniques that fiction writers use to portray consciousness and understand the history behind some of these techniques
- Analyze and interpret the various ways that fictional works can shed light on human empathy, understanding, and compassion (or the absence of these qualities)
- Demonstrate an understanding of the elements that often distinguish fiction from other genres of writing
- Write their own work of short fiction, drawing directly on the examples and techniques we've examined throughout the semester

Communication Learning Goals

Although the central questions of this course will focus on empathy in fiction (and in life) the central goal of the course isn't to increase your knowledge about this topic; the central goal is to use this topic as a vehicle to help you build the essential reading, writing, critical thinking, and visual and oral communication skills you'll need in order to be successful in the rest of your academic career and beyond. We'll place particular emphasis on the writing process and the act of writing itself as a method of inquiry, a vehicle for joining cultural and academic conversations, and a way to clarify, develop, and challenge our own thoughts. By taking this course, students will:

- Enhance their understanding of the central place of writing and communication in the learning process and in academic life.
- Learn strategies for analyzing, synthesizing, and responding to college level readings.
- Improve their ability to communicate correctly and effectively in writing and in speech, taking into account audience and purpose.
- Become comfortable with writing as a process and learn strategies—for instance, prewriting, outlining, and revision—for working through that process.
- Learn appropriate use of the work of others, and, where necessary, specific practices of citation.
- Learn to articulate oral arguments and to respond productively to arguments of others in formal presentations and class discussions.

Assignments and Grading Percentages

Reading Responses	5%
Oral Presentations	10%
Paper #1 (summary of an academic article)	15%
Paper #2 (brief definition essay)	15%
Paper #3 (literary analysis for a general audience)	20%
Paper #4 (literary analysis with sources)	30%
Paper #5 (short story)	5%

<u>Grading Scale</u>

A+ = 100-98	A = 97-93	A- = 92-90
B+ = 89-88	B = 87-83	B- = 82-80
C+ = 79-78	C = 77-73	C- = 72-70
D+ = 69-68	D = 67-63	D- = 62-60
F = 59-0		

Note: I round up on grades of .5 or higher

Also note: Unlike many other Rice courses, FWIS courses are not eligible for the Pass/Fail option. Furthermore, FWIS courses may not be dropped after the second week of classes, except with special approval by the administration.

Course Materials
You will need to purchase the following books:

- Cisneros, Sandra. *The House on Mango Street*
- Salinger, J.D. *Franny and Zooey*

You are strongly encouraged to purchase the following book as well:

- Graff and Birkenstein, *They Say/I Say*, Norton, 3rd edition

The rest of the course readings will be available as PDFs on OWL-Space. It is your responsibility to print out and annotate each course reading before arriving to that day's class, or to bring an annotated e-copy to class via laptop or tablet. Besides the texts and the typical supplies you need for any class—writing utensils, paper, etc.—I recommend you bring one other specific item to class: a notebook just for this course. **Keep a notebook exclusively for the communication tips we discuss in class**; then you can review all these tips as you're drafting or revising an assignment.

Reading Responses
Reading responses will take the form of a relatively brief and conversational letter to me and/or your classmates about the reading assignment. Reading Responses are due by **noon** on the day of class, though I recommend you complete them well in advance of that deadline. Late responses will not be accepted. I'll try to post each Reading Response assignment by 5pm of the previous class day. (Feel free to email me if you notice I haven't posted it by that time.) Reading responses are informal, low-stakes writing tasks meant to generate thought and conversation about our course readings. **All completed reading responses will receive a 100.** Reading responses that are incomplete—either because they don't meet all the requirements of the assignment or because they don't demonstrate that you read the entire text carefully—will receive a 50. At the end of the semester, **I do drop the two lowest reading response grades for each student.** One more important note: Reading Responses and all assignments for this course (including essays) are due by the required time and date whether you attend class or not.

Essay Submission and Grading
During the process of writing each essay, you'll be required to submit pre-writing and rough drafts online via Owl-Space. All rough drafts and prewriting will be due by noon on the required due date. At the end of the revision process for each essay, you will submit a final draft via Owl-Space. All final drafts must be submitted by the date and time listed on the course calendar, unless you and I have spoken and agreed in advance to an alternate submission time or date. (I'm fairly flexible about due dates with students who approach me about an alternate due well in advance of the scheduled due date.)

I'll return your graded essays via Owl-Space approximately two weeks after the due date. You have until the end of the semester to submit an optional rewrite of that essay for a new grade. **Your final grade on each essay will be the average of your original grade and the new grade you receive on the rewrite. However, if you have missed ANY of the process work assignments (i.e. rough drafts or pre-writing) for a given essay, you are NOT eligible to rewrite that essay for a new grade.** If you have submitted all your process work and plan to submit a rewrite, I strongly encourage you to meet with me outside of class at some point to discuss my comments on your essay and your plans for revising the essay.

Honor Code
One of the purposes of FWIS is to help new students understand the Rice Honor Code and, more explicitly, to teach students the rules of paraphrasing and scholarly attribution, and the appropriate uses of different types of evidence. Accordingly, FWIS instructors will take an educational approach to transgressions of these rules and respond to errors in these areas foremost as issues for grading and opportunities to correct errors, rather than as instances of academic dishonesty. At the same time, all FWIS instructors retain the authority to treat instances of repeat or egregious violations as matters for the attention of the Rice Honor Council. In this course, students are expected to do the actual writing of their assignments on their own, with no outside help from anyone else. However, students are strongly encouraged (and will sometimes be required) to collaborate on all other aspects of their coursework; including discussing assignments, reading each other's work, and making suggestions for editing and revision.

Disabilities
Any student with a documented disability seeking academic adjustments or accommodations should speak with me during the first two weeks of class. All discussions will remain as confidential as possible. Additionally, students with disabilities will need to contact Disability Support Services in the Allen Center.

Absences
Attending each meeting of this course will be integral to your development as a writer and communicator. Class meetings will offer you a chance to develop and clarify ideas for papers, revise and edit your work, and receive feedback from your professor and your peers. **Students who miss more than 3 class meetings (except for official, documented participation in university events) may be docked 10 points—the equivalent of one letter grade—on their final average at my discretion.** With the exception of official university events and extreme, documented circumstances, there are no excused absences. Make sure you don't miss more than 3 days over the course of the semester.

Class Communication
I'll expect everyone, including myself, to be civil and attentive during class time. This means listening attentively and refraining (always) from using your phone during class or using your laptop for non-class activities. During class discussions, you should feel free to disagree with me or your classmates—disagreement is a valuable part of academic life—but please make sure to do so in a polite and respectful way. In the rare case that a student repeatedly fails to be civil or attentive, he or she will be asked to leave class, resulting in an absence.

This same rule of polite, respectful, and attentive communication applies to your interactions with myself and your classmates online, both in Reading Responses and via email. If you email me, the email should be appropriate to the genre and audience (i.e. an email to your professor). This doesn't mean your emails have to be overly formal, but it does mean they shouldn't be written as if they were text messages to a friend.

I should respond to any email within 24 hours (and usually quicker), except on weekends. I try to respond to student emails by the end of each school day before I leave and in the mornings when I arrive on campus. I don't generally check my Rice email at night; don't expect me to respond right away to emails you send at night. (If you are hoping for a quick response during the school day, you can always try to reach me by calling my office.) If you send me an email during the week and I don't respond within a day, feel free to email me again or remind me in class; sometimes I accidentally overlook emails. **I'll communicate with the class as a group through Owl-Space and occasionally through your Rice email; make sure to check both of these daily.**

Office Hours and Feedback
Although I don't have set office hours, I'm always happy to meet with you by appointment at any time that works for both of us. In fact, I highly encourage you to meet with me to discuss your work outside of class time. Just email me or call my office. I'm usually available to answer brief questions after each class, but if you'd like to set up a meeting with me, you need to **email me at least 24 hours in advance, and preferably earlier than that. Don't email me asking to meet that day. (You can also talk to me after class to set up a meeting time. This is often more efficient.)** Also, when you email, it would be helpful if you let me know whether you want to meet for 10, 20, or 30 minutes. It's your responsibility to lead the meeting, asking me questions or providing a specific area of your essay to focus on. **Unless otherwise noted, any meetings you schedule with me will take place at Brochstein Pavilion.**

When you submit process rough drafts online, I'll read everyone's submission (or a sampling of the submissions, depending on how much time I have) and then offer general suggestions in class for areas that the class needs to address as a whole. However, if you want specific comments on your paper, you can submit a hard copy to me during class in addition to the draft you submit online and I'll try to return the hard copy with comments by the next class meeting, if possible. If you want to discuss those comments in more detail, you can set up a meeting with me. (I highly recommend this, since my comments on rough drafts can often be spare, cryptic, or indecipherable.) Even if you don't submit a hard copy for comments, you can ask me to read specific sections of your essay and comment on them if you set up a meeting outside of class. However, it's important to note that, because of time constraints, I'll never be able to read your rough drafts as closely as I'll read your final draft when I'm grading it. **Even if I provide comments on your drafts or look at your paper in a meeting, there are very likely still other areas that we haven't discussed that need to be addressed before the final draft.**

One final note: You should always feel free to meet with me to discuss any of your grades, but in the case of major essays, please wait until at least 24 hours after I've returned the work, so that you have time to read and reflect on my comments and the grade.

CWOVC
You're encouraged to make appointments with the peer consultants at the Center for Written, Oral, and Visual Communication for our course assignments. These consultants **do not** proofread or edit your work, but they **will** provide feedback on topics such as the organization of your paper or presentation, the coherence of your argument, appropriate sentence structure, and consistent grammatical errors. The Center is located on the second floor mezzanine of the

Fondren library, and you can make an appointment at the Center's website: cwovc.rice.edu. The Center is open every day and includes some evening hours. Bring a hard copy of your essay and your assignment to your appointment. You may also make an appointment to practice oral presentations and/or to have a consultant review your slides. Make use of these resources.

Course Calendar
Particular details on the following calendar may change as the semester goes on, depending on the circumstances of the course. However, if I alter anything, I'll notify you well ahead of time. Note, too, that you're expected to keep up with all assignments and readings, whether or not I remind you about the upcoming due dates during the previous class meeting. Readings and assignments listed on each date are to be completed BEFORE that day's class by the times specified above.

Week 1 – Fiction and Empathy: An Introduction to the Research and Debates
8/22: Introduction; review syllabus and course policies
8/24: Before class, read *They Say/I Say* introduction and first chapter and Kidd and Castano's "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind" (from *Science*) and submit diagnostic summary paragraph on Owl-Space
8/26: Before class, read Liberman's "That Study on Literary Fiction and Empathy Proves Precisely Nothing" (from *Slate*) and submit Reading Response #1 on Owl-Space; receive Paper #1 prompt at the end of class

Writing and communication topics: how to read an academic article; "They say/I say"; detecting (and adjusting to) genre, audience, and purpose

Week 2 – Summarizing Research on Empathy and Fiction; Consciousness and Self-Centeredness
8/29: Before class, read "Simplicity" and "Clutter" from *On Writing Well* and submit RR#2 (and bring optional rough draft of Paper #1 to class, if you want)
8/31: Before class, read Bal and Veltkamp's "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy?: An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation" from *PLOS One* and and **submit final draft of Paper #1 (one paragraph summary)**
9/2: Before class, read David Foster Wallace's "This is Water" and post RR#3; receive Paper #2 prompt during class

Writing and communication topics: concision (avoiding redundancies and unnecessary prepositions and "is" forms); signal words and citing another author's argument or evidence; avoiding evaluation while summarizing

Week 3 – Defining Empathy
9/5: No class; Labor Day holiday
9/7: Before class read Lamott's "Shitty First Drafts" and "Perfectionism" and submit rough draft of Paper #2 (brief definition essay)
9/9: Continue to work on rough draft of Paper #2 (Optional read: *They Say/I Say* chapter 10, "The Art of Metacommentary")

Writing and communication topics: meta-discourse and anticipating objections or misunderstandings; writing for a general audience

Week 4 – Challenging and Refining Our Definitions of Empathy; Introduction to Fiction
9/12: **At the beginning of class, submit final draft of Paper #2**
9/14: Before class, read Saunders's "Victory Lap" and post RR#3; receive Paper #3 prompt during class; in class, read the beginning of "The Empathy Diaries" from Sherry Turkle's *Reclaiming Conversation*
9/16: During class, read Kincaid's "Girl"; at the end of class, freewrite for Paper #3

Writing and communication topics: reading difficult texts; recognizing (and analyzing) structure

Week 5 – Third Person Narration and Free Indirect Discourse
9/19: Before class, read Chekhov's "Rothschild's Fiddle" and post RR#4; during class, read chapter 12 of *They Say/I Say*, "Entering Class Discussions"
9/21: Before class, read Li's "A Thousand Years of Good Prayers" and post RR#5
9/23: Before class, read Danticat's "Water Child" and post RR#6; at the end of class, freewrite for Paper #3

Writing and communication topics: developing a surprising and convincing thesis/interpretation; supporting your arguments with evidence

Week 6 – First Person Narration and the Flawed Narrator
9/26: Before class, read Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" and post RR#7
9/28: Before class, read Diaz's "The Pura Principle" and post RR#8
9/30: Before class, read Carver's "Cathedral" and post RR#9; at the end of class, freewrite for Paper #3

Writing and communication topics: analysis and close reading; active listening

Week 7 – Postmodernism and Magical Realism
10/3: Before class, read Alexie's "War Dances" and post RR#10
10/5: Before class, read Garcia Marquez's "A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings" and post RR#11
10/7: Oral Presentation #1; at the end of class (time permitting), freewriting for Paper #3

Writing and communication topics: the importance of storytelling in oral presentations; keys to engaging your audience as a presenter (body language, delivery, etc.)

Week 8 – Sharing and Presenting on Short Stories; Literary Analysis
10/10: No class; autumn recess
10/12: Before class, submit rough draft of Paper #3 (literary analysis for a general audience)
10/14: Continue to work on Paper #3

Writing and communication topics: What makes an effective argument/thesis?; contextualizing your introduction; central questions and the so what?; focus and coherence (i.e. developing your argument); what should a conclusion do?

Week 9 – Fiction and Close Reading
10/17: Before class, read chapter 9 of *They Say/I Say*, "Academic Writing Doesn't Always Mean Setting Aside Your Own Voice" and submit new draft of Paper #3
10/19: Continue to work on Paper #3
10/21: **At the beginning of class, submit final draft of Paper #3**

Writing and communication topics: quoting effectively (and quoting as both evidence and analysis); writing with clear characters and actions; avoiding wordy or unclear sentence structures; effective paragraphing

Week 10 – Empathy and the Novel(la): Class, Race, and "the Other"
10/24: Before class, read Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and post RR#12
10/26: Before class, search for research on *The House on Mango Street* and post RR#13
10/28: Before class, read Salinger's "Franny" and post RR#14

Writing and communication topics: introduction to scholarly databases; engaging academic research—searching for debates, common assumptions, ideas to build on, gaps in knowledge

Week 11 – Empathy and the Novel(la): Religion and Self-Awareness
10/31: Before class, read Salinger's "Zooey" and post RR#15
11/2: Before class, read articles on *Franny and Zooey* and post RR#16
11/4: Prep for Oral Presentation #2

Writing and communication topics: Using general-audience sources in academic research; presenting effectively with slides

Week 12 – Presenting on Scholarly Research on Salinger and Cisneros
11/7: Oral Presentation #2
11/9: Oral Presentation #2
11/11: Submit pre-writing for Paper #4

Writing and communication topics: gathering and organizing evidence for research papers; posing effective research questions

Week 13 – Joining (or Starting) a Scholarly Debate on Fiction and Empathy
11/14: Submit rough draft of Paper #4 (academic argument with sources)
11/16: Continue to work on Paper #4 (optional reading: *They Say/I Say* chapter 6, "Planting a Naysayer in Your Text")
11/18: Continue to work on Paper #4 (optional reading: *They Say/I Say* chapter 8, "Connecting the Parts")

Writing and communication topics: playing the "doubting game"—anticipating and responding to objections; engaging fairly and effectively with other scholars; in-text citation, works cited, and plagiarism

Week 14 – Revising and Editing Scholarly Arguments
11/21: Before class, read Lanham's "Action" from *Revising Prose* and submit new draft of Paper #4
11/23: **Submit final draft of Paper #4**; complete out-of-class assignment during class time (no class)
11/25: No class; Thanksgiving Holiday

Writing and communication topics: avoiding vague pronouns; using effective transitions and making your sentences "flow"

Week 15 – From Reading Fiction to Writing Fiction
11/28: Before class, submit rough draft of Paper #5 (short story); bring to class a hard copy of a story by one of your favorite authors
11/30: Short Story Workshops
12/2: **Bring final draft of Paper #5 to class**

Writing and communication topics: assessing the elements of a genre; receiving feedback and assessing your own work

Finals Week – Submit Optional Rewrites by your scheduled final exam day and time